

(19) World Intellectual Property
Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
18 March 2004 (18.03.2004)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2004/021908 A1

(51) International Patent Classification⁷: **A61B 18/14**

John, E. [US/US]; 184 Burlwood Drive, San Francisco, CA 94127 (US). FANTON, Gary, S. [US/US]; 265 Golden Oak Drive, Portola Valley, CA 94028 (US).

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2003/011844

(22) International Filing Date: 17 April 2003 (17.04.2003)

(74) Agent: PETROW, Joel; Smith & Nephew, Inc., 1450 Brooks Road, Memphis, TN 38116 (US).

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
10/124,954 17 April 2002 (17.04.2002) US

(81) Designated States (*national*): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(63) Related by continuation (CON) or continuation-in-part (CIP) to earlier applications:

US	10/124,954 (CON)
Filed on	17 April 2002 (17.04.2002)
US	60/037,782 (CON)
Filed on	12 February 1997 (12.02.1997)
US	09/340,065 (CON)
Filed on	25 June 1999 (25.06.1999)
US	6/135,999 (CON)
Filed on	12 February 1998 (12.02.1998)

(84) Designated States (*regional*): ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

(71) Applicant (*for all designated States except US*): ORATEC INTERVENTIONS, INC. [US/US]; 3700 Haven Court, Menlo Park, CA 94025 (US).

Published:

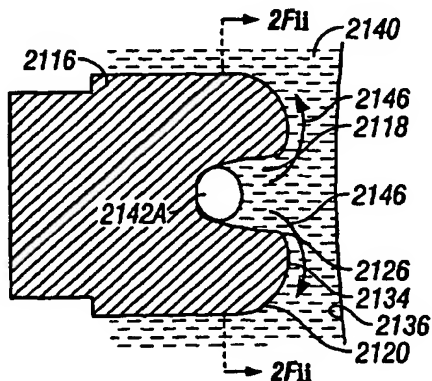
- with international search report
- before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (*for US only*): CARRANZA, Remberto, J. [US/US]; 600 McCellan Drive, San Francisco, CA 94080 (US). SHARKEY, Hugh, R. [US/US]; 1695 Edgewood Road, Redwood City, CA 94062 (US). ASHLEY,

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: ELECTROSURGICAL INSTRUMENT HAVING A CHAMBER TO VOLATIZE A LIQUID



(57) Abstract: An electrosurgical instrument is provided which includes a holding formation, a probe shaft, an electric conductor, and a probe tip. The probe shaft is secured to the holding formation and has an elongated section extending therefrom. The electric conductor extends along the elongated section. The probe tip is located on a distal end of the probe shaft opposing the holding formation. The probe tip defines a volatization chamber with a mouth out of the probe tip. The probe tip includes an electrode, to which RF current is provided through the electric conductor. The electrode heats an area adjacent to the probe tip. The electrode also heats a liquid in the first volatization chamber to evaporate the liquid into a vapor pocket that ejects from the first volatization chamber through the mouth out of the probe tip. A pump effect is created so that the liquid maintains the probe tip at a more stable temperature.

ELECTROSURGICAL INSTRUMENT HAVING A CHAMBER TO VOLATIZE A LIQUID

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This is a continuation-in-part of 09/340,065, filed on June 25, 1999, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent No. 6,135,999, filed on February 12, 1998, which claims priority from provisional patent application No. 60/037,782, filed on February 12, 1997, all of which are incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1) Field of the Invention

[0002] The invention relates to surgical systems applying thermal energy to biological tissue to modify the characteristics of the tissue. More particularly, the invention is directed to electrosurgical probes utilizing radio frequency (RF) energy to cut, coagulate, and/or ablate the tissue during a medical procedure for treatment and therapy.

2) Discussion of Related Art

[0003] Arthroscopic surgery is becoming increasingly popular, because it generally does less damage, is less invasive, and is safer than open procedures, and produces less scarring in and around joints. This type of surgery further

results in a faster healing response and a quicker return of the patient to full productivity while reducing costs of open surgical procedures.

[0004] Arthroscopic surgery is usually performed with an electrosurgical instrument having a handle, a rigid elongated probe extending from the handle, and an electrode on a tip of the probe. A surgeon, holding the handle, inserts the tip into a body of a patient and positions the tip adjacent to a surgical site. RF current is then provided to the electrode to heat a fluid in an area adjacent to the tip and the surgical site.

[0005] A problem with an electrosurgical instrument of this kind is that the temperature of the electrode tends to fluctuate as a liquid circulates over the surgical site and over the electrode. What is needed is an electrosurgical instrument of this kind having a probe tip with a more stable temperature.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] According to one aspect of the invention, an electrosurgical instrument is provided which includes a holding formation, a probe shaft, an electric conductor, and a probe tip. The probe shaft is secured to the holding formation and has an elongated section extending therefrom. The electric conductor extends along the elongated section. The probe tip is located on a distal end of the probe shaft opposing the holding formation. The probe tip defines at least a first volatization chamber with a mouth out of the probe tip. The probe tip includes at least one electrode, to which RF current is provided through the electric conductor. The electrode heats an area adjacent to the probe tip. The electrode also heats a liquid in the first volatization chamber to evaporate the liquid into a vapor pocket that ejects from the first volatization chamber through the mouth out of the probe tip.

[0007] The holding formation may be a handle.

[0008] The probe shaft may be substantially rigid to allow a surgeon to move the probe tip into position without a guide.

[0009] The electric conductor may be attached to the electrode.

[0010] An inner surface of the electrode may define the volatization chamber.

[0011] Preferably, at least one cross-section through the probe tip and the volatization chamber shows no openings from the volatization chamber out of the probe tip.

[0012] The electrode may have an exposed outer surface around the volatization chamber. The exposed outer surface may entirely surround the volatization chamber.

[0013] The electrode may have a front face around the mouth. The front face may entirely surround the mouth.

[0014] The volatization chamber may have a larger cross-sectional area than the mouth.

[0015] The electrode may be a power electrode, and the probe tip may further include a ground electrode electrically connected to the power electrode through more of the liquid.

[0016] The electrosurgical instrument may further include a ground conductor extending along the elongated section and electrically attached to the ground electrode.

[0017] The electrosurgical instrument may further include a thermocouple attached to the probe tip, and a thermocouple wire extending from the thermocouple along the elongated section.

[0018] The probe tip may have at least a second volatization chamber therein. The electrode may heat more of the liquid in the second volatization chamber. The second volatization chamber may have a separate mouth out of the probe tip than the first volatization chamber. The second volatization chamber may be a ring around the first volatization chamber.

[0019] According to another aspect of the invention, an electrosurgical

instrument is provided having a probe tip including an electrode to which current is provided through an electric conductor, the electrode having an exposed face with at least a first recessed volatization chamber formed therein.

[0020] According to another aspect of the invention, a method of treating a surgical site within a body of a patient is provided. A probe tip is inserted into a surgical port formed in the body of the patient until the probe tip is positioned adjacent to the surgical site. The surgical port is at least partially filled with a liquid. The liquid enters the volatization chamber in the probe tip. RF current is provided to the electrode. The electrode heats an area adjacent to the probe tip. The electrode also heats the liquid in the volatization chamber. The liquid in the volatization chamber evaporates into a vapor pocket which ejects from a mouth of the volatization chamber out of the probe tip.

[0021] The vapor pocket is preferably contained in the volatization chamber for a period of time, to allow for growth of the vapor pocket.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0022] The invention is described by way of examples with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0023] Figures 1A-C are a side view of an RF probe, a side view of an operating cannula, and a cross-sectional side view of the shaft portion of the RF probe, respectively;

[0024] Figures 2A-D are side, end, perspective, and cross-sectional side views of a probe tip for an electrosurgical instrument, according to an embodiment of the invention, wherein the probe tip has a volatilization chamber formed therein;

[0025] Figures 2E(i)-2G(ii) are views illustrating the use of the probe tip, with Figures 2E(i), 2F(i), and 2G(i) being cross-sectional side views, and 2E(ii), 2F(ii), and 2G(ii) being cross-sectional end views on A-A in Figures 2E(i), 2F(i), and 2G(i), respectively;

[0026] Figures 3A-D are side, end, perspective, and cross-sectional side views of a probe tip having an electrode with a flat face;

[0027] Figures 4A-E are side, end, perspective, and cross-sectional side views of two probe tips, each having two vapor pocket chambers;

[0028] Figures 5A-C are side, perspective, and cross-sectional side views of a probe tip having a volatilization chamber within a ground terminal;

[0029] Figures 6A-D are side and cross-sectional side views of three different probe tips having vapor pocket chambers with larger cross-sections than mouths

out of their vapor pocket chambers;

[0030] Figures 7A-D are side, perspective, and cross-sectional side views of two probe tips having a front face with a conical depression therein;

[0031] Figures 8A-D are side, end, perspective, and cross-sectional side views of a probe tip having shallow vapor pocket chambers in a domed portion of an external surface of an electrode;

[0032] Figures 9A-F are side, perspective, and cross-sectional side views of two probe tips, each having two vapor pocket chambers in communication with one another;

[0033] Figures 10A-D are side, end, perspective, and cross-sectional side views of a probe tip having an electrode which is secured through a fastener so that an area around the fastener forms a volatilization chamber; and

[0034] Figures 11A-D are side, end, perspective, and cross-sectional side views of a probe tip having structures and features that promote unidirectional flow of liquid into the probe tip and volatilize liquid out of the probe tip.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0035] Figure 1 illustrates a simplified view of an electrosurgical instrument 1200 and cannula 1202 according to an embodiment of the invention. Figure 1A is an illustration of a conventional cannula 1202 utilized in one embodiment of the invention. Cannula 1202 consists of a guide 1224 with an opening 1226 at its distal end. Cannula 1202 is attached at its proximal end to introducer 1222. Instrument port 1228 is located at the proximal end for the introduction of the surgical probe. Cannula 1202 may also have an extension 1232 with a fluid port 1236. As illustrated in Figure 1B, electrosurgical instrument 1200 consists of a handle 1212 to which is attached a power cord 1210, a probe shaft 1214, and a probe tip 1216. During introduction into the body, a blunt insert or obturator (not shown) is inserted through instrument port 1228. Cannula 1202 is inserted into the surgical site on the patient functioning as a trocar. Electrosurgical instrument 1200 is then inserted into cannula 1202 through instrument portal 1228 so that the tip 1216 protrudes from the opening 1226 in cannula 1202. Probe shaft 1214 is rigid and securely attached to the handle 1212 to allow a surgeon to maneuver the probe tip 1216 into a desired position and orientation without a guide.

[0036] Figure 1C illustrates a cross-sectional side view of the probe shaft 1214. Probe handle 1212 is connected to shaft tubing 1242. Shaft tubing insulator 1241 covers the shaft tubing 1242. The shaft tubing insulator 1241 may be any

biocompatible material such as Teflon or any other suitable material such as nylon shrink tubing. Power wire 1260 is connected to a power supply (not shown) in the proximal portion of the probe and probe handle 1212. Power insulator 1267 covers and insulates power wire 1260. The power insulator 1267 material is preferably a tubing such as Teflon or polyimide, but may also include any other insulator material which would be known by a person skilled in the art, such as a coating. Power wire 1260 connects the power supply to an active electrode (not shown) on the distal energy application tip 1250. The power wire may be stainless steel, titanium, tungsten, copper, or any other compatible and suitable conductor. A return wire 1261 connects a return electrode (not shown in Figure 1) to the power supply. The energy application tip 1250 has an energy application surface 1255. The energy application surface 1255 is configured to have a variety of configurations such as concave, convex, or concavo-convex for the delivery of thermal energy to the soft tissue site. Probe shaft tubing 1242 may also have a bent portion 1251 which may be configured for easier access to narrow or confined joint spaces.

[0037] Figures 2A-D illustrate a probe tip 2112 on an end of a probe shaft 2114, according to an embodiment of the invention. The probe tip 2112 includes an energy application tip or an electrode 2116 having a dimple or volatilization chamber 2118 formed therein.

[0038] The electrode 2116 has a conductive outer surface 2120 and a conductive inner surface 2122. The surfaces 2120 and 2122 are formed symmetrically about

an elongated axis 2124 of the probe shaft 2114. The outer surface 2120 forms a dome shape, and the inner surface 2122 forms a recess in a distal end of the electrode 2116. The volatilization chamber 2118 is defined by the inner surface 2122 of the electrode 2116. The only passage into or out of the volatilization chamber 2118 is through a mouth 2126 thereof.

[0039] An electric power conductor 2130 extends through the probe shaft 2114, and has an end which is attached to the outer surface 2120. The probe shaft 2114 has a nonconductive outer shell 2132, which prevents electric current from conducting between the electric power conductor 2130 and an area surrounding the probe shaft 2114. RF current can be provided through the electric power conductor 2130 to the outer surface 2120. The outer surface 2120 is electrically connected to the inner surface 2122, so that RF current is also provided to the inner surface 2122.

[0040] Figures 2E(i) to 21G(ii) illustrate how the electrode 2116 is used to create, grow, and eject vapor pockets, and thereby mobilize heated liquid that offsets convective cooling from the electrode 2116 to surrounding liquid.

[0041] A surgical port is formed into the body of a patient utilizing a cannula, and is partially defined by a surgical site 2136 within the body of the patient. The surgeon inserts the electrode 2116 into the surgical port and positions a face 2134 surrounding the mouth 2126 adjacent to the surgical site 2136. The surgical port is then filled with a liquid 2140, typically a saline solution, that covers the surgical site 2136. The liquid 2140 fills the areas around the outer surface 2120

and within the volatilization chamber 2118.

[0042] RF current is then applied to the surfaces 2120 and 2122. In this embodiment, because the probe tip 2112 has a monopolar construction, the RF current conducts through the liquid 2140 and the body of the patient to ground. Alternatively, in a bipolar construction, the RF current conducts from the electrode 2116 and the tip 2112 to a separate return electrode located near the tip or on the probe shaft. The RF current heats an area adjacent to the outer surface 2120 and the inner surface 2122. The heat adjacent to the outer surface 2120 heats the surgical site 2136, and the heat adjacent to the inner surface 2122 heats the liquid in the volatilization chamber 2118.

[0043] As shown in Figures 2E(i) and 2E(ii), the liquid within the volatilization chamber 2118 expands and ultimately evaporates, creating one or more small bubbles or vapor pockets 2142 at a proximal surface of the volatilization chamber 2118. The formation of the vapor pocket 2142 mobilizes liquid on a distal side thereof to move in a direction 2144 out of the volatilization chamber 2118.

[0044] Further heating of the liquid within the volatilization chamber 2118 causes further evaporation of the liquid. The vapor pocket or vapor pockets grow to form a larger vapor pocket 2142A, as illustrated in Figure 2F(i). Growth of the vapor pocket 2142A expels the heated liquid in directions 2146 over a distal face of the electrode 2116. The heated liquid 2140 heats the face of the electrode. Any tendency for the electrode 2116 to convect heat to colder liquid passing over outer surfaces thereof is counteracted by the warm liquid flowing out of the

volatization chamber 2118 over the face of the electrode. As illustrated in the cross-section of Figure 2F(ii), the vapor pocket 2142A is entirely surrounded by the inner surface 2122, so that the vapor pocket 2142A is contained within the volatization chamber 2118 by inner surface 2122.

[0045] As illustrated in Figures 2G(i) and 2G(ii), the vapor pocket eventually grows into a larger vapor pocket 2142B, which ejects or eructs from the volatization chamber 2118 through the mouth 2126 out of the electrode 2116. The volatization chamber 2118 is simultaneously replenished with more of the liquid 2140 flowing in directions 2150 into the volatization chamber 2118. It is believed that eddy currents are created as cooler liquid rushes in to fill the volatization chamber 2118, and that the eddy currents assist in the heating and evaporation of the liquid in the volatization chamber 2118.

[0046] A continuous, thermodynamic pump effect is created, whereby the liquid continues to circulate over inner and outer surfaces of the probe tip 2112. Liquid is continuously heated in the volatization chamber 2118 and subsequently flows with the vapor pockets over outer surfaces of the probe tip 2112, thereby maintaining its temperature. A warmer probe tip 2112 allows for the probe tip 2112 to be held further away from the surgical site 2136 and thereby create a more even temperature profile over the surgical site 2136 with less searing. Continuous circulation of the liquid also clears the probe tip 2112 from any tissues that accumulate over the probe tip 2112 and especially inside the volatization chamber 2118.

[0047] The volatized liquid can also be used to regulate or modify the electrical power that is supplied to the electrode 2116. A vapor pocket between the electrode 2116 and the surgical site 2136 electrically insulates active surfaces of the electrode 2116 from the surgical site 2136 so that energy transfer from the electrode 2116 to the tissue of the surgical site 2136 is blocked off. The impedance rises when the energy transfer is blocked off, with a corresponding reduction in electric power delivered to the electrode 2116 by a generator.

[0048] Figures 3A-D illustrate a probe tip 2212 according to another embodiment of the invention. The probe tip 2212 includes an electrode 2216 having an outer surface 2220. The outer surface 2220 has a cylindrical outer portion 2222 and a front face 2224, which is flat. A volatization chamber 2226 is formed into the face 2224. The volatization chamber has a mouth 2228, having a diameter which is approximately half the outer diameter of the face 2224. A more even temperature profile can be created adjacent to the surgical site with the face 2224, because the face 2224 more accurately reflects the profile of the surgical site.

[0049] Figures 4A-D illustrate a probe tip 2310, according to a further embodiment of the invention. The probe tip 2310 has an electrode 2312, having a first volatization chamber 2314 and a second volatization chamber 2316 formed in a front face 2318 thereof. The second volatization chamber 2316 has a separate mouth than the first volatization chamber 2314. The second volatization chamber 2316 is in the form of a ring that entirely surrounds the first volatization

chamber 2314.

[0050] As illustrated in Figure 4D, an electric power conductor 2330 extends through a probe shaft 2332, and is attached to the electrode 2312. The probe tip 2310 thus has a monopolar construction. Figure 4E illustrates a probe tip 2340 having a bipolar construction. As in the embodiment of Figure 4D, the probe tip 2340 has an electrode 2342 and an electric power conductor 2344 extending through a probe shaft 2346 to the electrode 2342. In addition, the probe tip 2340 also has a cylindrical ground terminal 2348 located distally relative to the electrode 2342 around the shaft 2346. An electric ground conductor 2350 extends through the probe shaft 2346, and is attached to the terminal 2348. As will be understood from the foregoing description, the liquid electrically connects the electrode 2342 with the terminal 2348, so that RF current provided through the electric power conductor 2344 conducts through the liquid, the terminal 2348, and the electric current conductor 2350 to ground.

[0051] Figures 5A-C illustrate a probe tip 2410, according to a further embodiment of the invention, which allows generation of more vapor pockets. The probe tip 2410 is also of bipolar construction. The probe tip 2410 has an electrode 2412 and a ground terminal 2414. The ground terminal 2414 forms an internal first chamber 2416. A liquid can flow through a mouth 2418 into a second chamber 2424, and then through openings 2426 in the ground terminal 2414 into the first chamber 2416. RF current provided to the electrode 2412 conducts through the liquid in the second chamber 2424 to the ground terminal

2414. The RF current in the ground terminal 2414 then heats the liquid in the first chamber 2416. Volatized liquid and vapor pockets eject from the first chamber 2416 through the openings 2426 into the second chamber 2424. More liquid will then be volatized within the second chamber 2424. Volatized liquid and vapor pockets are then ejected through the mouth 2418 out of the probe tip 2410. Colder liquid simultaneously enters the second chamber 2424 through the mouth 2418 and flows from the second chamber 2424 through the openings 2426 into the first chamber 2416.

[0052] Figures 6A-D illustrate probe tips 2510, 2520, and 2530 according to further embodiments of the invention. In each embodiment, a volatization chamber 2540 has an inner portion 2544, having a larger cross-sectional area than a mouth 2546 of the volatization chamber 2540. Due to the larger cross-sectional area and therefore larger volume of the internal portion 2544, larger vapor pockets are created before they are ejected through the mouth 2546.

[0053] The probe tip 2510 of Figures 6A and 6B has an electrode 2560 and an electric power conductor 2562 connected thereto. The probe tip 2510 has a monopolar construction. The probe tips 2520 and 2530 of Figures 6C and 6D, respectively, have bipolar constructions. The probe tip 2520 has an external ground terminal 2570 and an electric ground conductor 2572 connected thereto. The probe tip 2530 has an internal ground terminal 2580. A front portion of the ground terminal 2580 is located within the volatization chamber 2540, and a rear portion of the terminal 2580 forms a ground conductor 2582. The electrode 2560

of the probe tip 2530 is located on an external surface only, i.e., not also on internal surfaces of the volatilization chamber 2540 of the probe tip 2530. The electrode 2560 is thus electrically disconnected from the terminal 2580. Electric current can conduct between the electrode 2560 and the terminal 2580 through liquid in the volatilization chamber 2540.

[0054] Figures 7A-D illustrate probe tips 2610 and 2620 according to further embodiments of the invention. The probe tip 2610 of Figures 7A-C includes an electrode shell 2622, an outer insulator 2624, and an inner insulator plug 2626. The electrode shell 2622 has a cylindrical portion 2628, and a front face portion 2630. The plug 2626 is located within the cylindrical portion 2628. A front face of the plug 2626 is spaced from the face portion 2630 of the electrode 2622. A volatilization chamber 2634 is defined by inner surfaces of the front face portion 2630, the cylindrical portion 2628, and the front face of the plug 2626, jointly. The front face portion 2630 is formed into a conical depression 2640 having a peripheral surrounding rim 2642. Openings 2650 form mouths out of the chamber 2634 into the area surrounded by the conical depression 2640. Vapor pockets created within the chamber 2634 are ejected through the openings 2650. The rim 2642 may be located relatively close to a surgical site, so that volatilized fluid from the vapor pockets is contained within the conical depression 2640.

[0055] The probe tip 2620 of Figure 7D includes a nonconductive shell 2670, a nonconductive plug 2672, an electrode 2674, and a ground terminal 2676. The nonconductive shell 2670 has the same shape as the conductive electrode shell

2622 of the probe tip 2610 of Figures 7A-C. The nonconductive shell 2670 defines an internal chamber 2680, together with the plug 2672. The electrode 2674 is located on a face of the plug 2672, and has a face that is exposed into the internal chamber 2680. The ground terminal 2676 is positioned around a cylindrical portion of the nonconductive shell 2670. The electrode 2674 is electrically connected through a fluid along a path 2686. The path 2686 passes through the chamber 2680 to volatize liquid within the chamber 2680 to generate vapor pockets. The path 2686 also passes over an external surface of the nonconductive shell 2670 to create heat that treats a surgical site.

[0056] Figures 8A-D illustrate a probe tip 2710, having an electrode 2720 with shallow vapor pocket chambers 2722. The electrode 2720 has an outer surface with a dome-shaped portion 2726 and a front face 2728 which is flat. The chambers 2722 are all formed in the dome-shaped portion 2726. Either the dome-shaped portion 2726 or the face 2728 may be positioned adjacent to the surgical site. Should the dome-shaped portion 2726 be located against the surgical site, the vapor pockets will be ejected out of one or more of the chambers 2722 toward the surgical site.

[0057] Figures 9A-F illustrate probe tips 2810 and 2820, according to yet further embodiments of the invention, each having two vapor pocket chambers 2830 and 2832 that are interconnected with one another. The probe tip 2810 of Figures 9A-C has a nonconductive shell 2836, and a conductive electrode 2838. The nonconductive shell 2836 has a cylindrical portion 2842 and a front portion 2844.

A ring-shaped depression 2850 is formed in the front portion 2844. An internal volume 2852 is formed jointly by the front portion 2844, the cylindrical portion 2842, and the electrode 2838. The depression 2850 divides the internal volume 2852 into the central chamber 2830 and the outer chamber 2832. The outer chamber 2832 is in the form of a ring around the central chamber 2830. The chambers 2830 and 2832 are in communication with one another because of an annular spacing 2860 between the depression 2850 and the electrode 2838. The chamber 2832 acts as a reservoir of vapor. The vapor is ultimately expelled from the chamber 2832 through the spacing 2860 and the chamber 2830 and then through a mouth 2870 out of the probe tip 2810.

[0058] The probe tip 2810 has a monopolar construction. Current conducts from the electrode 2838 through the chamber 2830 and the mouth 2870 to a body of a patient. The probe tip 2820 of Figure 9D has a bipolar construction. The probe tip 2820 is the same as the probe tip 2810, except that a ground terminal 2880 is located around the cylindrical portion 2842. Current conducting through the mouth 2870 can conduct around the nonconductive shell 2836 to the ground terminal 2880.

[0059] Thermocouples may be connected to the probe tips described herein. Figure 9E, for example, illustrates the probe tip 2810 of Figures 9A-C, which further has a thermocouple 2890 with thermocouple wires 2892. The thermocouple 2890 is attached to the front portion 2844 near the mouth 2870. The thermocouple wires 2892 extend from the thermocouple 2890 through the

internal volume and through the probe shaft to the handle. Figure 9F illustrates a thermocouple 2896 attached to the probe tip 2820 of Figure 9D in a similar manner.

[0060] Figures 10A-D illustrate a probe tip 2910 according to a further embodiment of the invention. The probe tip 2910 includes a shell portion 2912, one electrode 2914, a fastener 2916, a nonconductive coating 2918, and a ground terminal 2920. The shell portion 2912 has a depression formed in a front portion 2924 thereof. The fastener 2916 is secured to a center of the front portion 2924. The electrode 2914 is secured to the fastener 2916 and a portion of the fastener 2916 spaces the electrode 2914 from the front portion 2924. As such, an annular chamber 2926 is defined around the portion of the fastener 2916 that spaces the electrode 2914 from the front portion 2924. An annular mouth 2930 is defined between an outer surface of the electrode 2914 and an inner surface of the shell portion 2912. Vapor pockets eject from the chamber 2926 through the annular mouth 2930. The nonconductive coating 2918 is formed around a cylindrical portion of the shell portion 2912. The ground terminal 2920 is located around the nonconductive coating 2918. Current can conduct through a liquid between the electrode 2914 and the ground terminal 2920.

[0061] Figures 11A-B illustrate a probe tip 3010 that includes structures and features that promote unidirectional flow through a chamber 3012. The probe tip 3010 includes a frame portion 3014, electrodes 3016, a nonconductive coating 3020, and a ground terminal 3022. The frame portion 3014 includes an inner

portion 3028, a cylindrical outer portion 3030, an annular face portion 3032, and an annular divider portion 3034. The inner portion 3028 is located inside the outer portion 3030. The annular face portion 3032 has an outer edge located at the outer portion 3030 and extends inwardly therefrom. The annular face portion 3032 is spaced from a face of the inner portion 3028. The annular divider portion 3034 extends inwardly from an inner edge of the face portion 3032 toward the inner portion 3028. An annular ring-shaped chamber 3040 is formed jointly by the annular divider portion 3034, the annular face portion 3032, and the outer portion 3030. Liquid entry openings 3046 are formed through the outer portion 3030 into the chamber 3040. The annular divider portion 3034 has an inner surface 3050, and the electrodes 3016 are mounted within the inner surface 3050. The electrodes 3016, in cross-section, have a corrugated profile which increases fluid resistance. Liquid enters through the liquid entry passages 3046 into the chamber 3048, and then flows into a region between the electrodes 3016 and the surface 3050 of the annular divider portion 3034. The liquid is there evaporated into vapor pockets that are ejected through a mouth 3070 formed by an inner edge of the annular face portion 3032. More liquid then enters through the liquid entry passages 3046. It can thus be seen that unidirectional flow can be maintained with the features and structures of the probe tip 3010, in particular the corrugated profile of the electrodes 3016.

[0062] While certain exemplary embodiments have been described and shown in the accompanying drawings, it is to be understood that such embodiments are

merely illustrative and not restrictive of the current invention, and that this invention is not restricted to the specific constructions and arrangements shown and described since modifications may occur to those ordinarily skilled in the art.

CLAIMS

What is claimed:

1. An electrosurgical instrument, comprising:
a holding formation;
a probe shaft secured to the holding formation and having an elongated section extending therefrom;
an electric conductor extending along the elongated section; and
a probe tip on a distal end of the probe shaft opposing the holding formation, the probe tip defining at least a first volatilization chamber with a mouth out of the probe tip, and including at least one electrode to which RF current is provided through the electric conductor, the electrode heating an area adjacent to the probe tip and a liquid in the first volatilization chamber to evaporate the liquid into a vapor pocket that ejects from the first volatilization chamber through the mouth out of the probe tip, creating a thermodynamic flow of the liquid in front of the vapor pocket.
2. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 1, wherein the holding formation is a handle.
3. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 2, wherein the probe shaft is substantially rigid to allow a surgeon, holding the handle, to move the probe tip

into position without a guide.

4. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 1, wherein the electric conductor is attached to the electrode.
5. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 1, wherein an inner surface of the electrode defines the volatization chamber.
6. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 1, wherein at least one cross-section through the probe tip and the volatization chamber shows no openings out from the volatization chamber out of the probe tip.
7. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 1, wherein the electrode has an exposed outer surface around the volatization chamber.
8. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 7, wherein the exposed outer surface entirely surrounds the volatization chamber.
9. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 7, wherein an inner surface of the electrode defines the volatization chamber.
10. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 1, wherein the electrode has a front

face around the mouth.

11. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 10, wherein the front face entirely surrounds the mouth.

12. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 1, wherein the volatization chamber has a larger cross-sectional area than the mouth.

13. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 1, wherein the electrode is a power electrode, the probe tip further including a ground electrode electrically connected to the power electrode through more of the liquid.

14. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 1, wherein growth of the vapor pocket expels liquid heated in the volatization chamber through the mouth and over an external face of the probe tip to heat the face, and the volatization chamber is replenished with more liquid when the vapor pocket ejects from the volatization chamber.

15. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 13, further comprising:
a ground conductor extending along the elongated section and electrically attached to the ground electrode.

16. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 1, further comprising:
 - a thermocouple attached to the probe tip; and
 - a thermocouple wire extending from the thermocouple along the elongated section.
17. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 1, wherein the probe tip has at least a second volatization chamber therein.
18. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 17, wherein the electrode heats more of the liquid in the second volatization chamber.
19. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 17, wherein the second volatization chamber has a separate mouth out of the probe tip than the first volatization chamber.
20. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 19, wherein the second volatization chamber is a ring around the first volatization chamber.
21. An electrosurgical instrument, comprising:
 - a holding formation;
 - a probe shaft secured to the holding formation and having an elongated section extending therefrom;

an electric conductor extending along the elongated section; and
a probe tip on a distal end of the probe shaft opposing the holding formation, the probe tip including an electrode to which RF current is provided through the electric conductor, the electrode having an exposed face with at least a first recessed volatization chamber formed therein.

22. The electrosurgical instrument of claim 21, wherein the probe tip has at least a second recessed volatization chamber therein.

23. A method of treating a surgical site within a body of a patient; comprising:
inserting a probe tip into a surgical port formed in the body of the patient until the probe tip is positioned adjacent to the surgical site;
at least partially filling the surgical port with a liquid, the liquid entering a volatization chamber in the probe tip; and
providing RF current to an electrode of the probe tip to heat an area adjacent to the probe tip and the liquid in the volatization chamber, the liquid in the volatization chamber evaporating into a vapor pocket which ejects through a mouth of the volatization chamber out of the probe tip, creating a thermodynamic flow of the liquid in front of the vapor pocket.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein growth of the vapor pocket expels liquid heated in the volatization chamber through the mouth and over an external face

of the probe tip to heat the face, and the volatization chamber is replenished with more liquid when the vapor pocket ejects from the volatization chamber.

25. The method of claim 24, wherein at least one cross-section through the probe tip and the volatization chamber shows no openings out from the volatization chamber out of the probe tip.

1/13

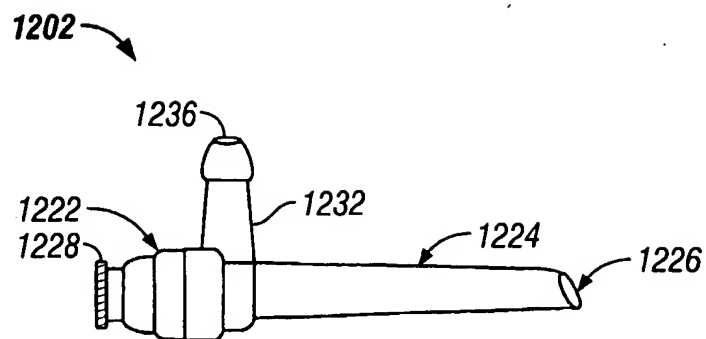


FIG. 1A

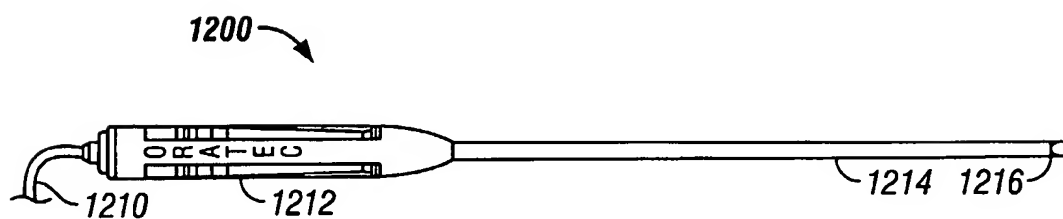


FIG. 1B

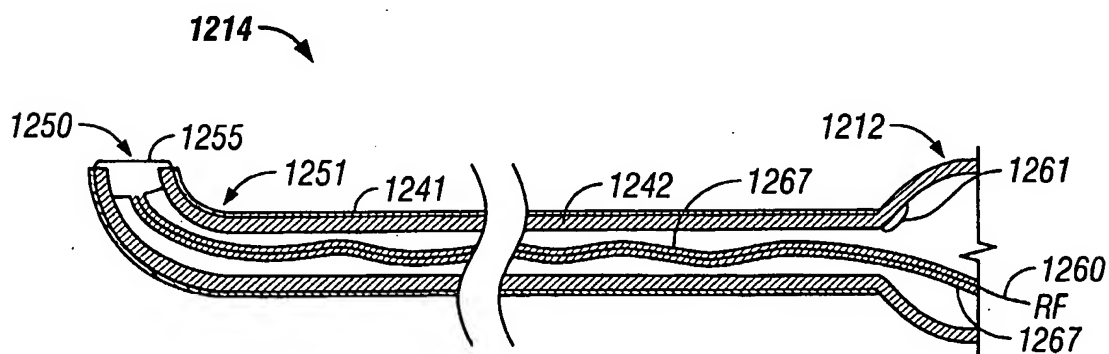


FIG. 1C

2/13

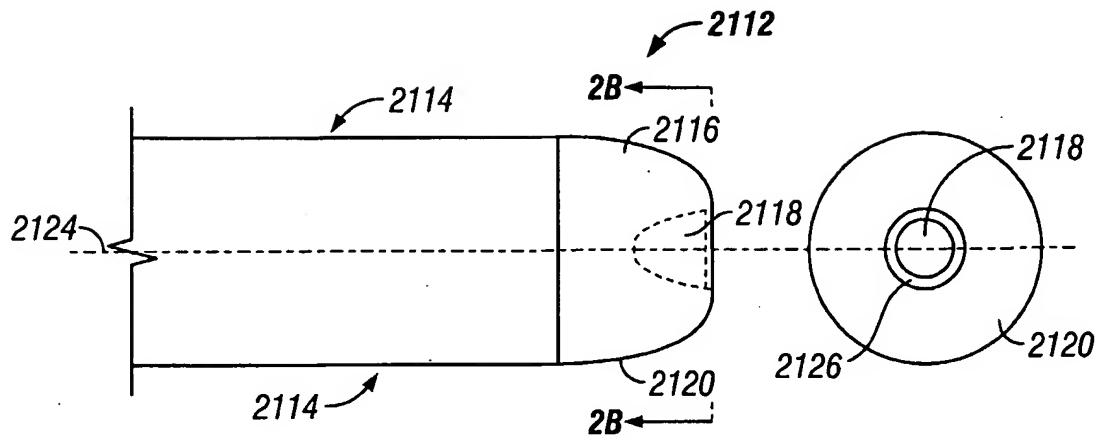


FIG. 2A

FIG. 2B

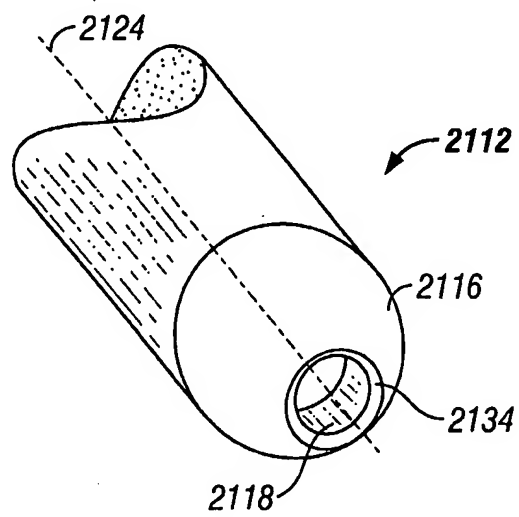


FIG. 2C

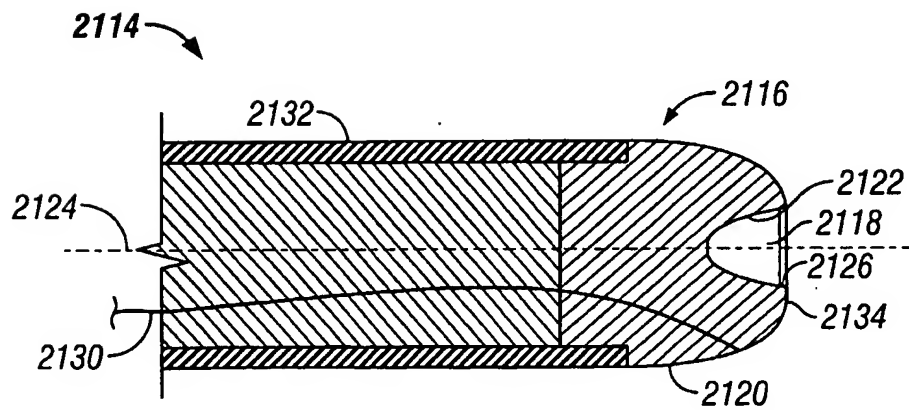


FIG. 2D

3/13

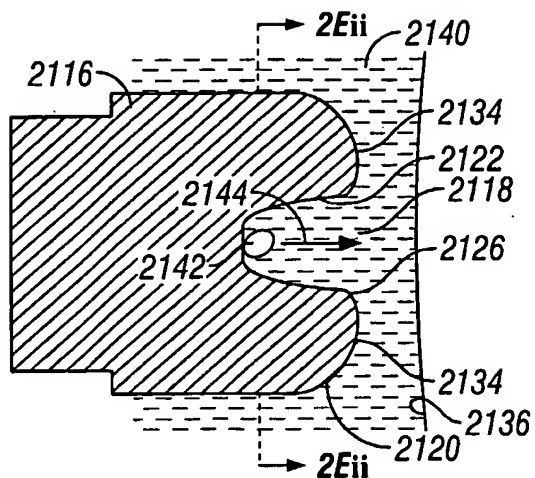


FIG. 2Ei

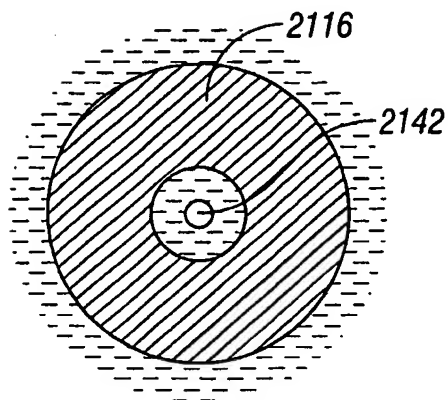


FIG. 2Eii

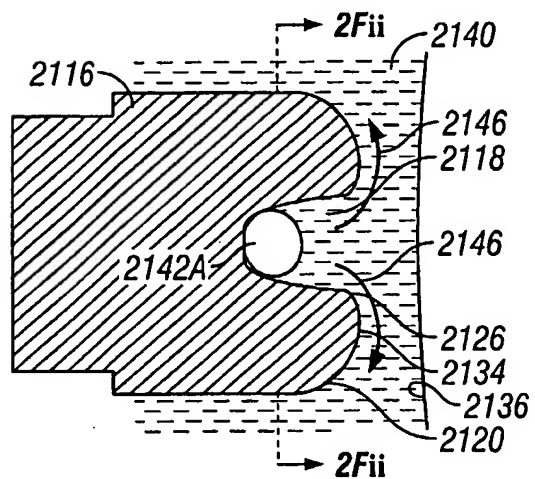


FIG. 2Fi

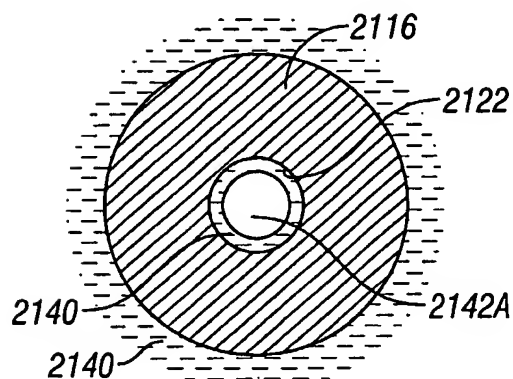


FIG. 2Fii

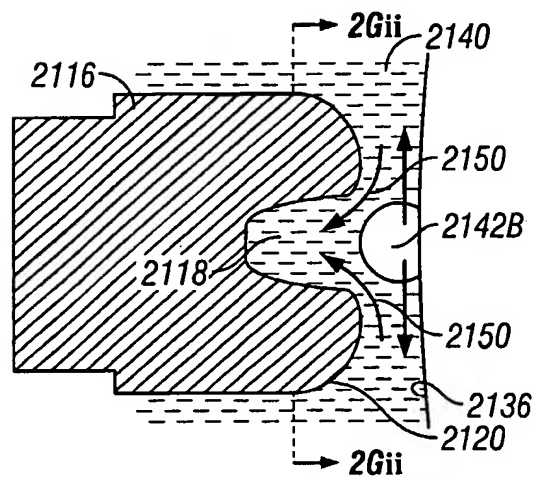


FIG. 2Gi

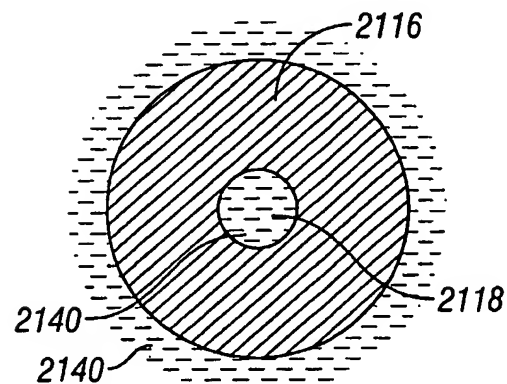
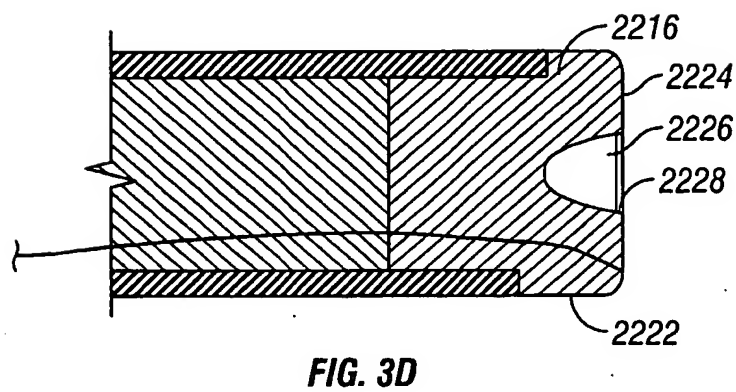
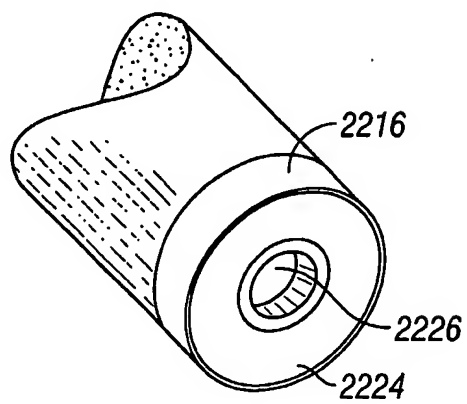
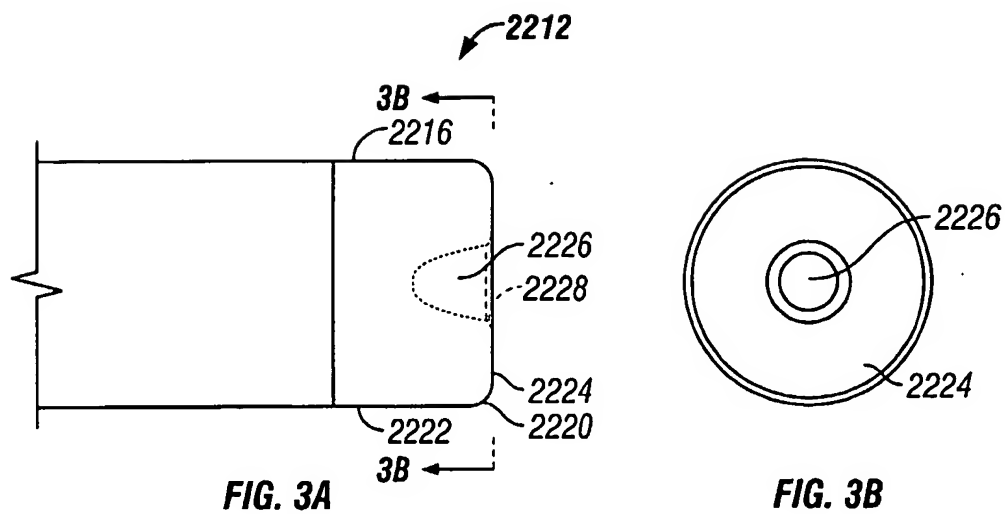
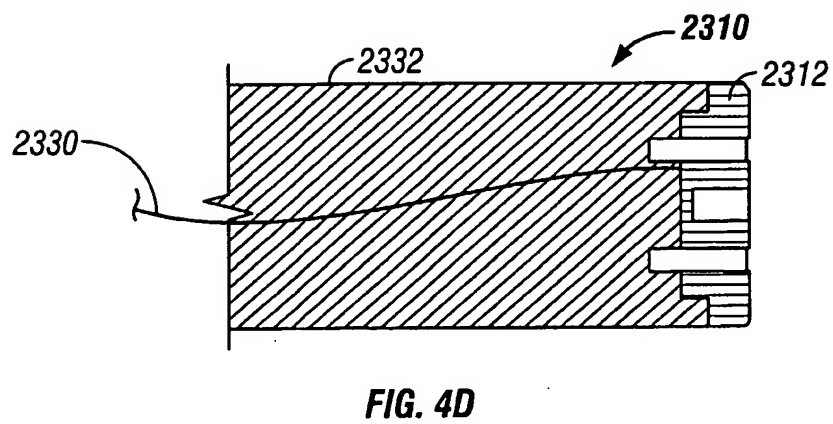
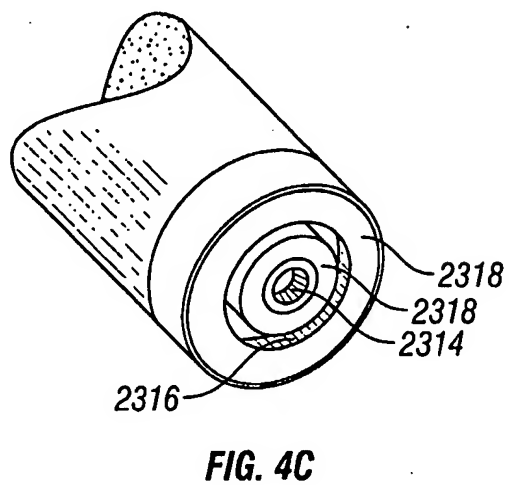
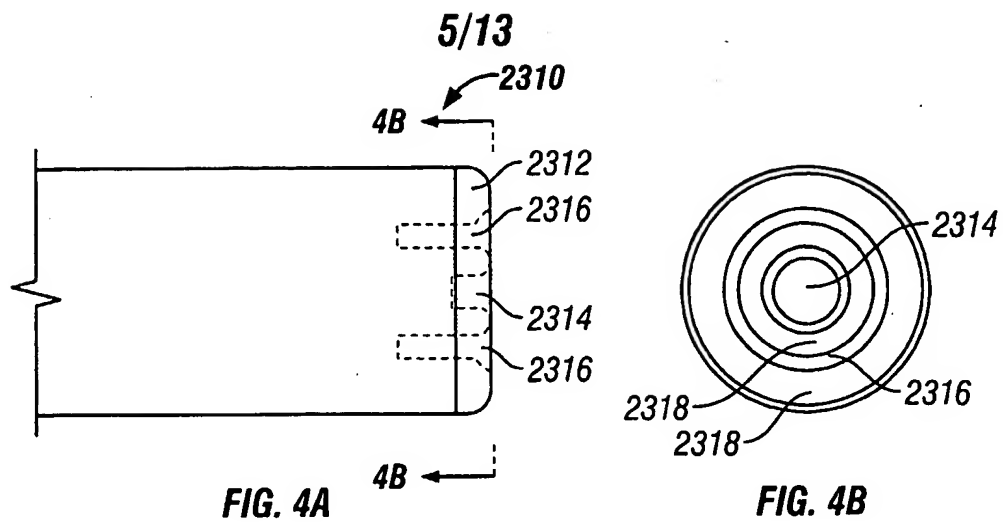


FIG. 2Gii

4/13





6/13

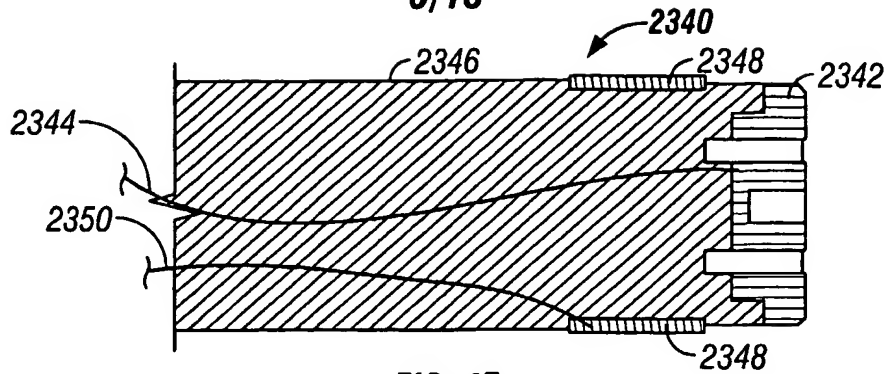


FIG. 4E

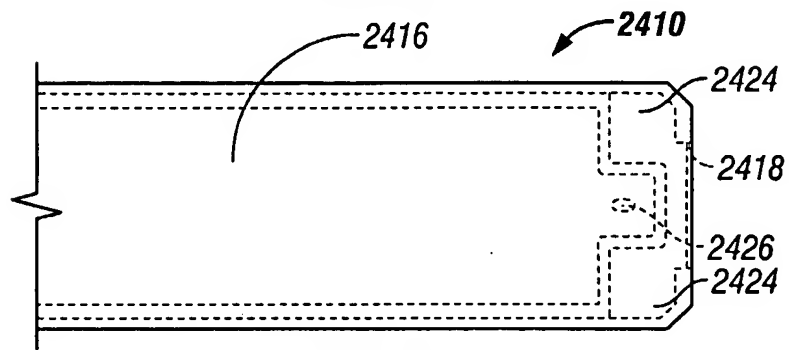


FIG. 5A

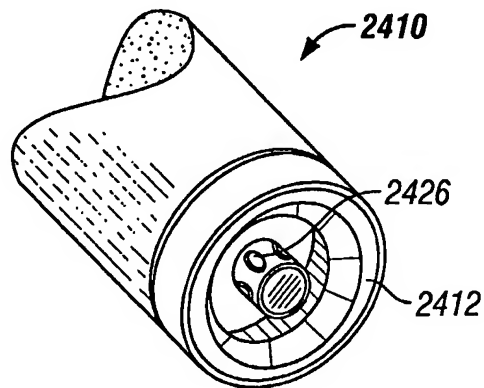


FIG. 5B

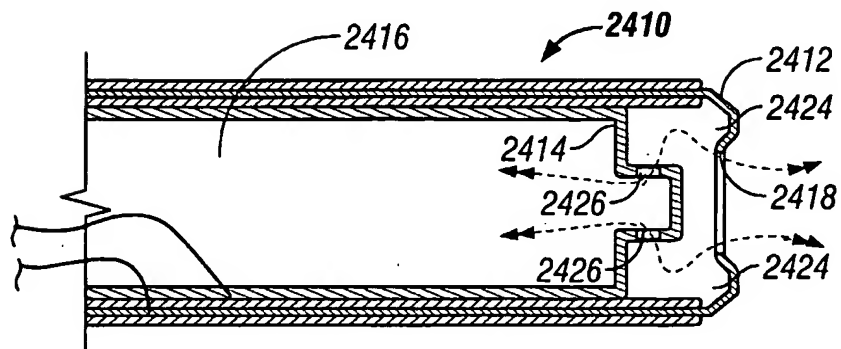


FIG. 5C

7/13

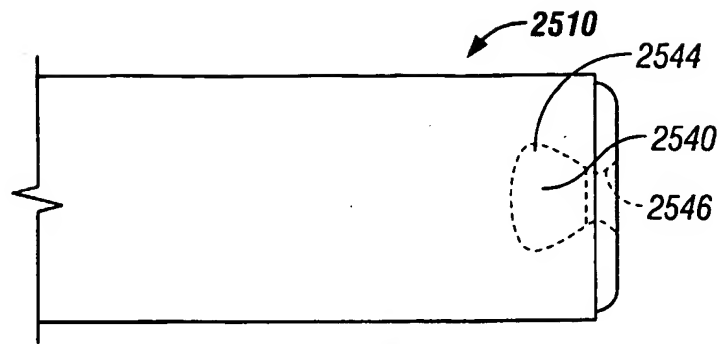


FIG. 6A

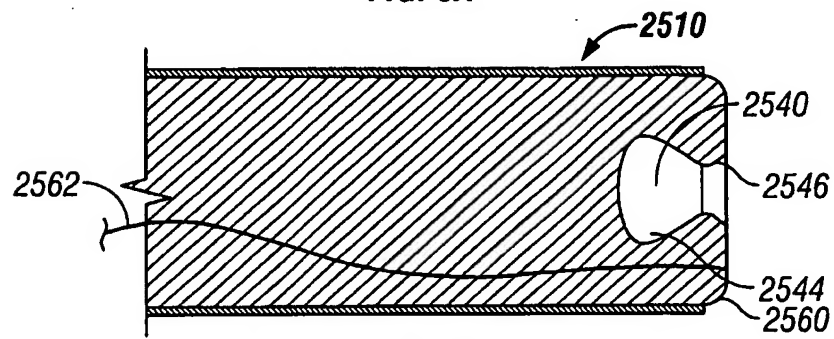


FIG. 6B

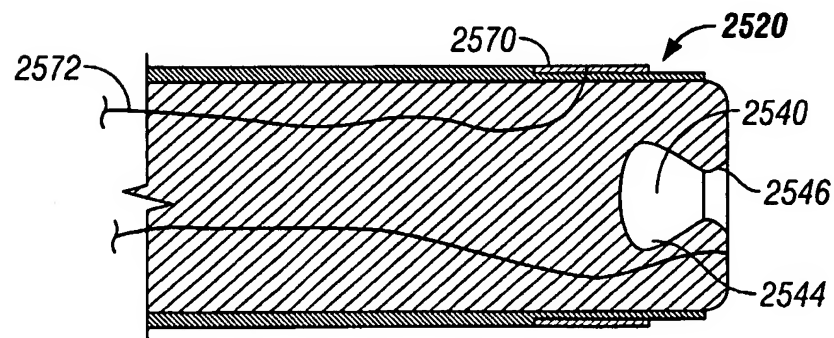


FIG. 6C

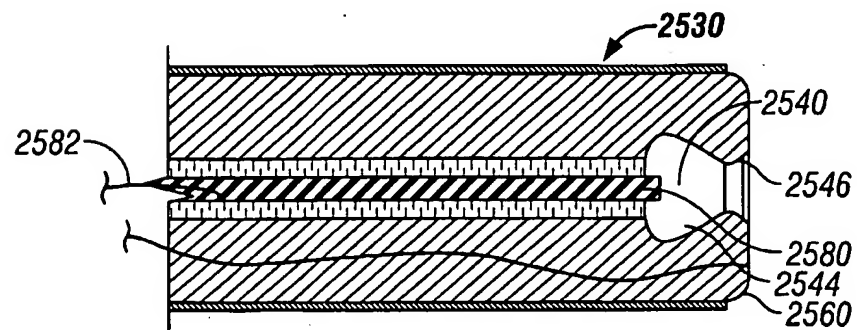


FIG. 6D

8/13

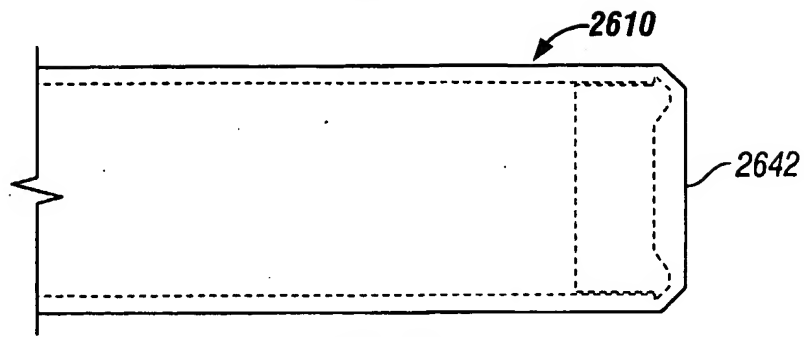


FIG. 7A

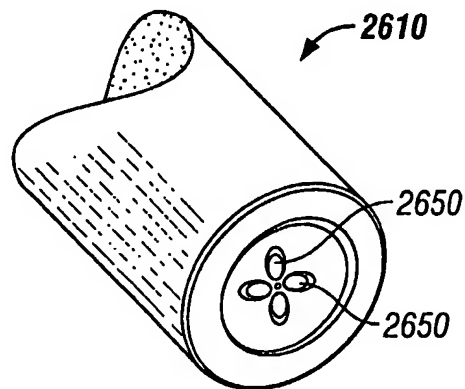


FIG. 7B

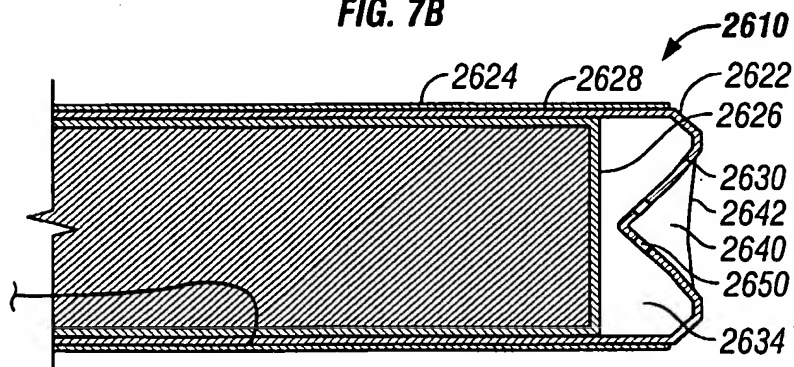


FIG. 7C

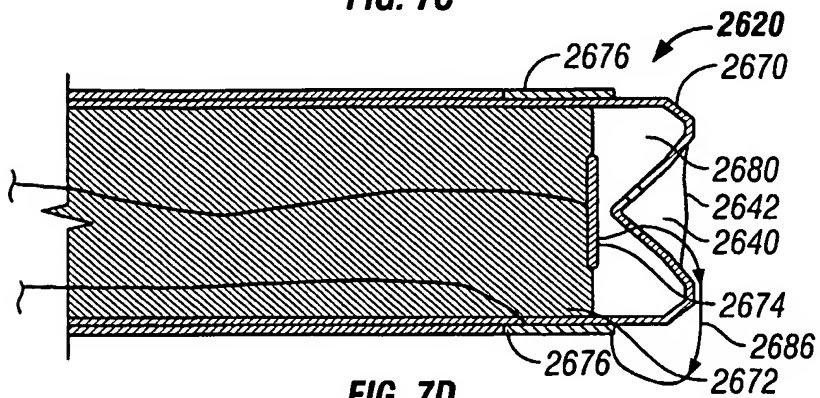
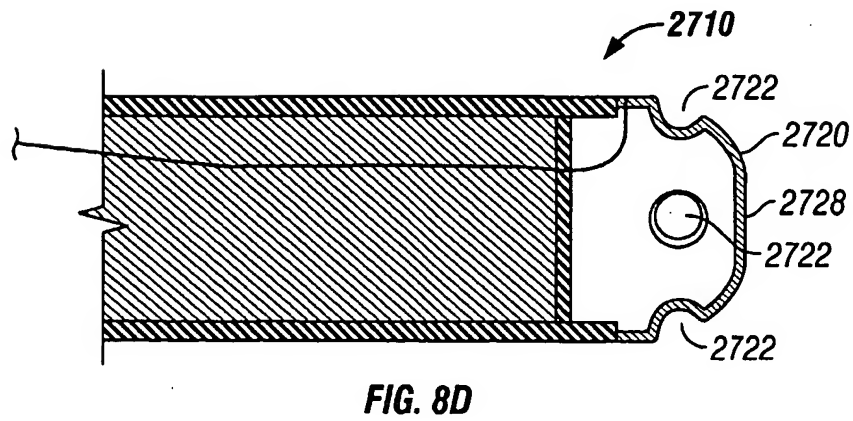
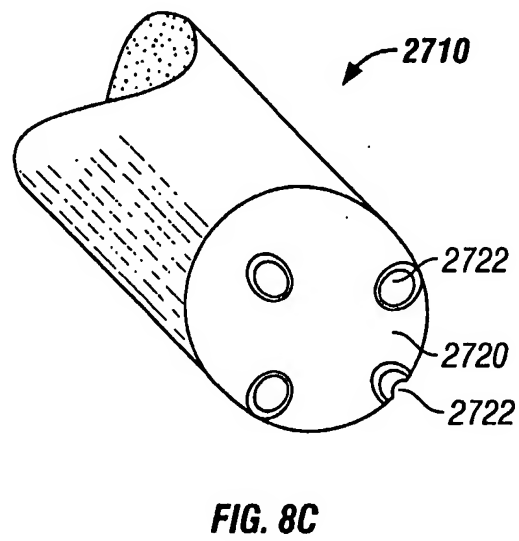
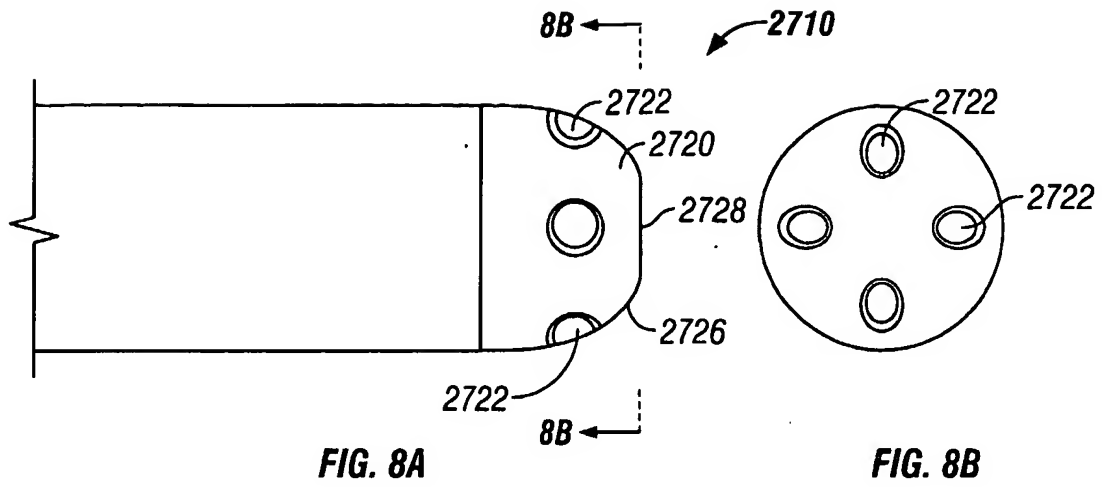


FIG. 7D

9/13



10/13

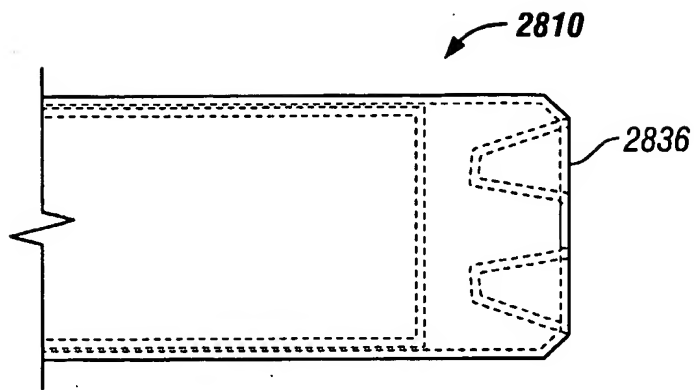


FIG. 9A

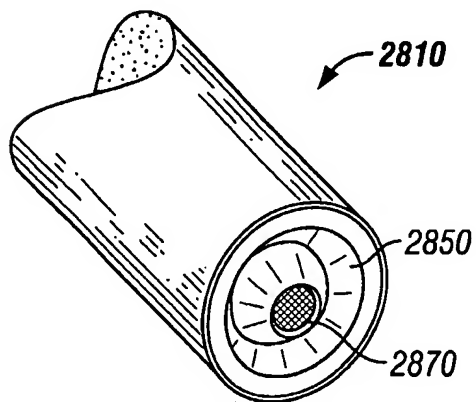


FIG. 9B

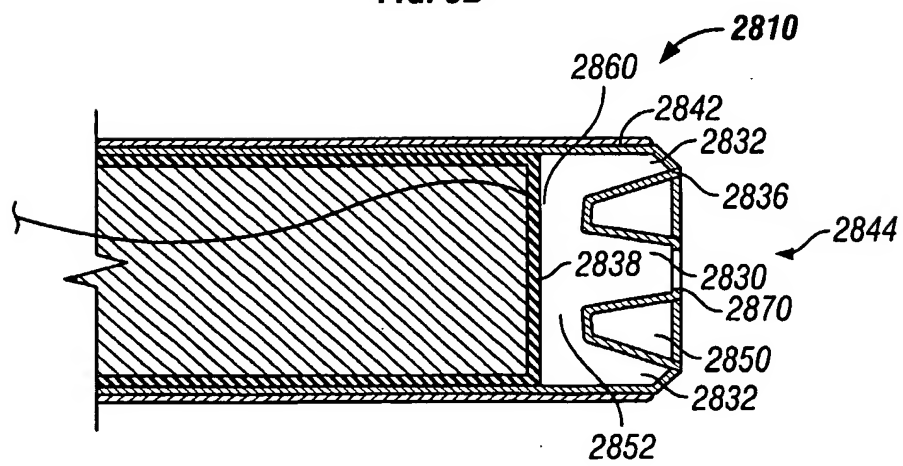


FIG. 9C

11/13

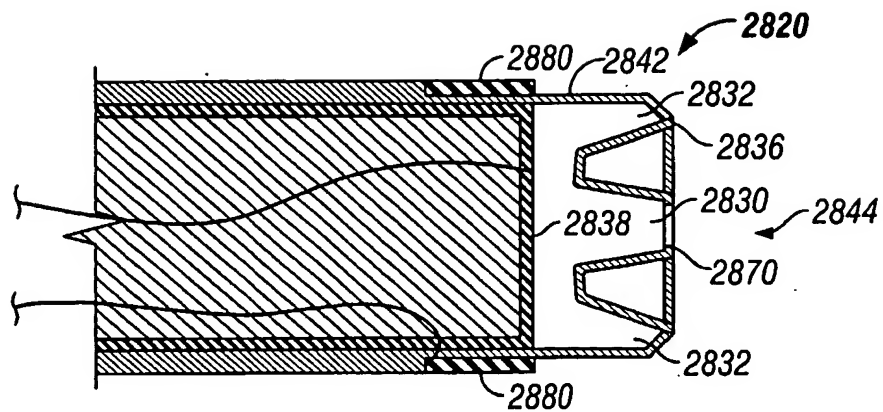


FIG. 9D

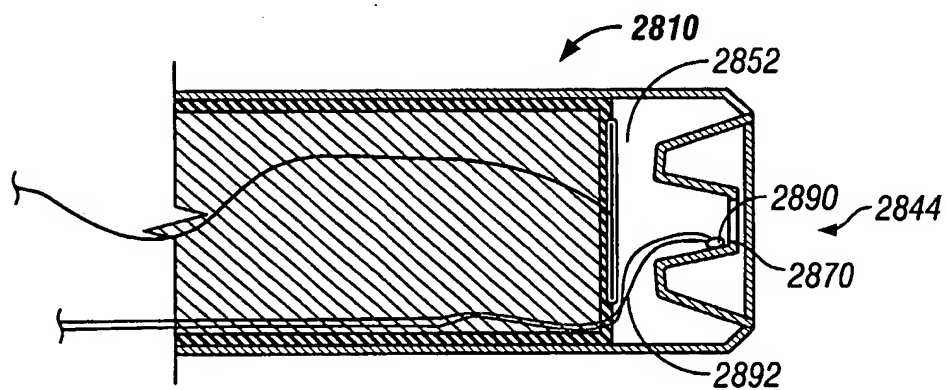


FIG. 9E

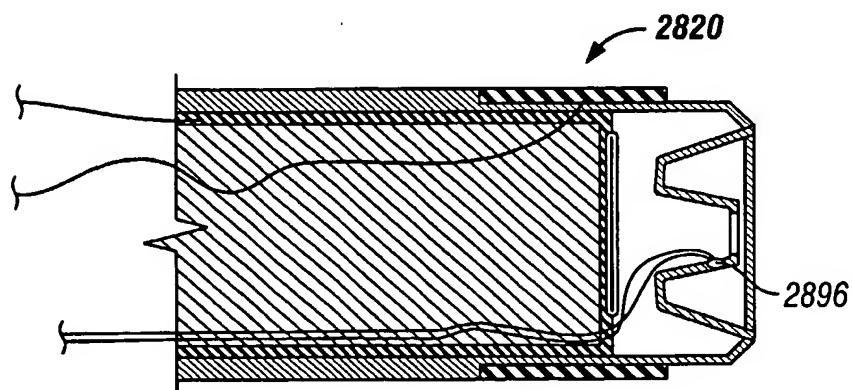


FIG. 9F

12/13

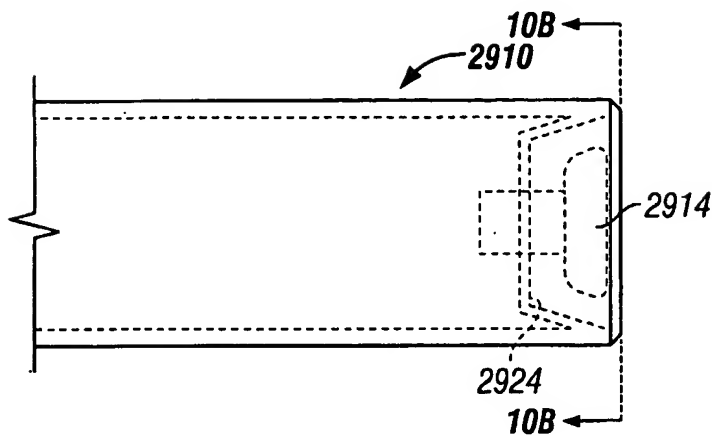


FIG. 10A

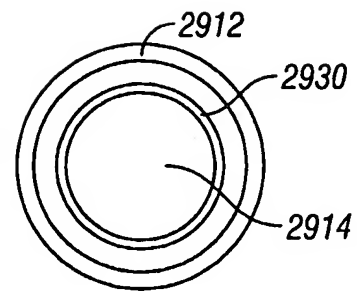


FIG. 10B

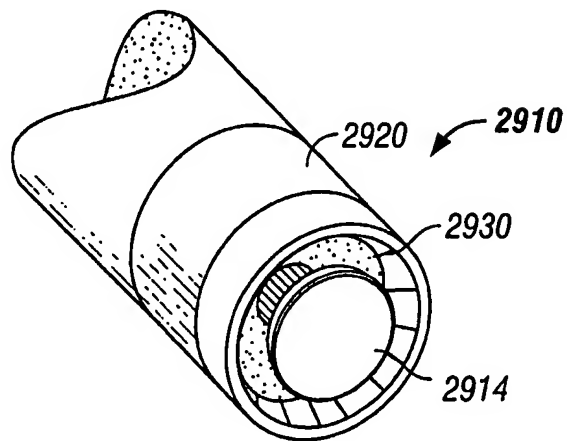


FIG. 10C

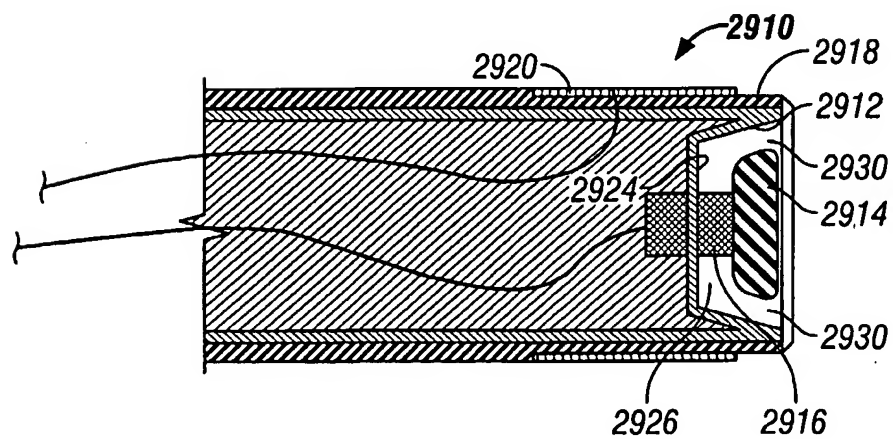


FIG. 10D

13/13

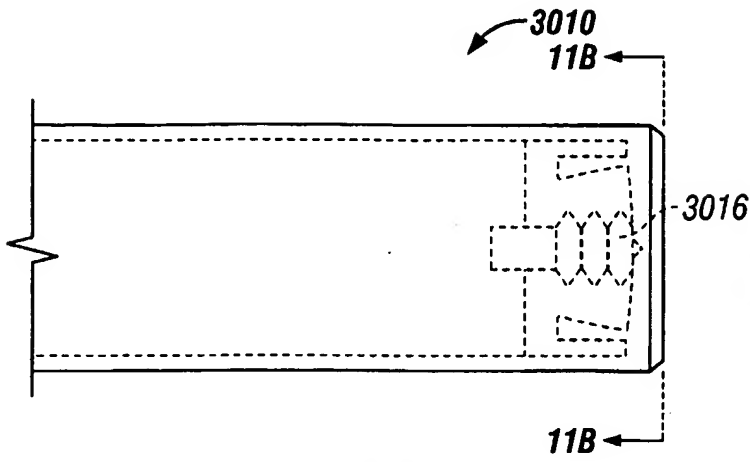


FIG. 11A

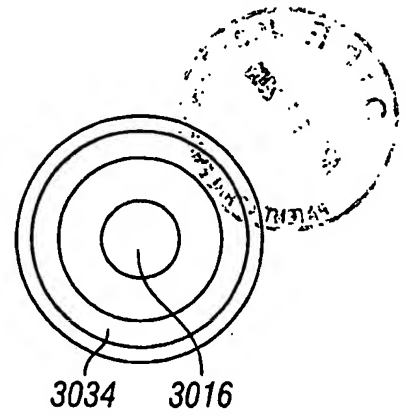


FIG. 11B

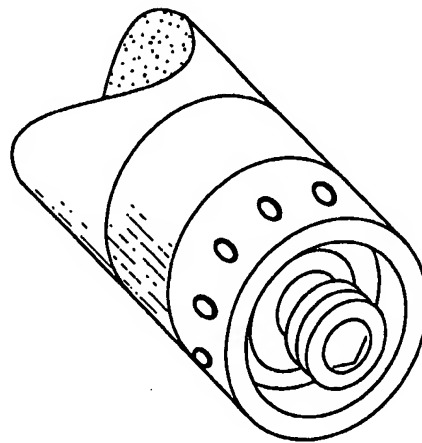


FIG. 11C

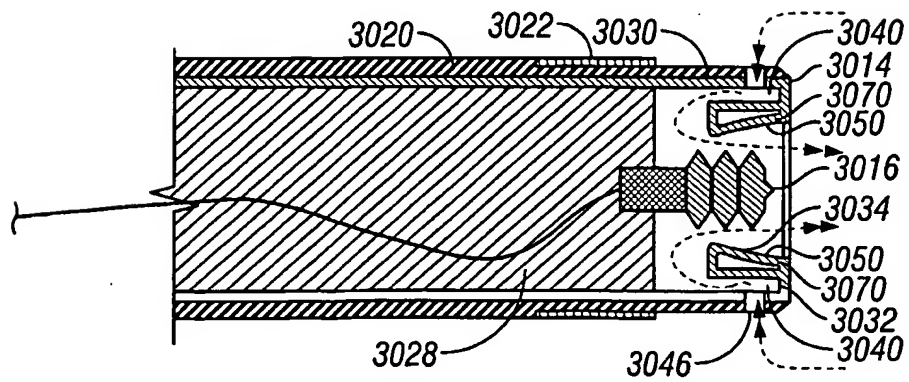


FIG. 11D

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 7 A61B18/14

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 A61B

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
P, X	US 2003/032954 A1 (CARRANZA J REMBERTO ET AL) 13 February 2003 (2003-02-13) the whole document	1-22
X	US 5 009 656 A (REIMELS HARRY G) 23 April 1991 (1991-04-23) the whole document	1-11, 21
X	US 5 683 366 A (EGGERS PHILIP E ET AL) 4 November 1997 (1997-11-04)	21
A	column 11, line 39 -column 12, line 16; figure 3	1-20, 22
A	WO 97 24994 A (GYRUS MEDICAL LTD ;GOBLE COLIN CHARLES OWEN (GB); GOBLE NIGEL MARK) 17 July 1997 (1997-07-17) page 13, line 9 -page 14, line 4; figures 8-11	1-22



Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.



Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

A document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

E earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

L document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

O document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

P document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

T later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

X document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

Y document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

& document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

4 February 2004

Date of mailing of the international search report

13/02/2004

Name and mailing address of the ISA

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2
NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl,
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Hansen, S

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US 03/11844

Box I Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 1 of first sheet)

This International Search Report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☒ Claims Nos.: **23-25**
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
Rule 39.1(iv) PCT - Method for treatment of the human or animal body by surgery
2. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the International Application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful International Search can be carried out, specifically:
3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box II Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this International Search Report covers all searchable claims.
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, this Authority did not invite payment of any additional fee.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this International Search Report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
4. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this International Search Report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest

- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest.
- ☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US 2003032954 A1	13-02-2003	US 6461357 B1	08-10-2002
		US 6135999 A	24-10-2000
		AU 5462100 A	31-01-2001
		CN 1371259 T	25-09-2002
		EP 1191892 A1	03-04-2002
		JP 2003503097 T	28-01-2003
		WO 0100099 A1	04-01-2001
		US 2003014050 A1	16-01-2003
		AU 6332798 A	30-08-1999
		WO 9940969 A1	19-08-1999
		US 6391028 B1	21-05-2002
		AU 6156198 A	26-08-1998
		EP 1006908 A2	14-06-2000
		JP 2002515801 T	28-05-2002
		WO 9834558 A2	13-08-1998
US 5009656 A	23-04-1991	NONE	
US 5683366 A	04-11-1997	US 5697281 A	16-12-1997
		US 5366443 A	22-11-1994
		AT 234592 T	15-04-2003
		AU 709928 B2	09-09-1999
		AU 1057197 A	11-06-1997
		CA 2237795 A1	29-05-1997
		DE 29623990 U1	08-02-2001
		DE 69626841 D1	24-04-2003
		DE 69626841 T2	18-12-2003
		EP 1036547 A2	20-09-2000
		EP 1179320 A2	13-02-2002
		EP 0865256 A1	23-09-1998
		JP 3033848 B2	17-04-2000
		JP 11502144 T	23-02-1999
		NZ 323589 A	29-07-1999
		US 6032674 A	07-03-2000
		US 6102046 A	15-08-2000
		WO 9718768 A1	29-05-1997
		US 2003171743 A1	11-09-2003
		US 6595990 B1	22-07-2003
		US 5860951 A	19-01-1999
		US 5873855 A	23-02-1999
		US 2002068930 A1	06-06-2002
		AT 207331 T	15-11-2001
		AU 706294 B2	10-06-1999
		AU 6026696 A	30-12-1996
		CA 2221330 A1	19-12-1996
		DE 29624229 U1	23-08-2001
		DE 69616327 D1	29-11-2001
		DE 69616327 T2	27-06-2002
		EP 1080682 A1	07-03-2001
		EP 0837647 A1	29-04-1998
		JP 2912023 B2	28-06-1999
		JP 10510745 T	20-10-1998
		US 6190381 B1	20-02-2001
		US 6355032 B1	12-03-2002
		US 6391025 B1	21-05-2002
		US 6063079 A	16-05-2000
		US 2003009164 A1	09-01-2003
		US 6235020 B1	22-05-2001

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No

PCT/US 03/11844

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US 5683366	A		US 6142992 A	07-11-2000
			US 6363937 B1	02-04-2002
			US 2002095152 A1	18-07-2002
			US 6053172 A	25-04-2000
			WO 9639914 A1	19-12-1996
			US 6224592 B1	01-05-2001
			US 6086585 A	11-07-2000
			US 2003014047 A1	16-01-2003
			US 6066134 A	23-05-2000
			US 6179836 B1	30-01-2001

WO 9724994	A	17-07-1997	AU 719565 B2	11-05-2000
			AU 1390397 A	01-08-1997
			BR 9706969 A	06-04-1999
			CA 2241662 A1	17-07-1997
			DE 69725699 D1	27-11-2003
			EP 1330989 A1	30-07-2003
			EP 0873089 A1	28-10-1998
			GB 2308980 A	16-07-1997
			WO 9724994 A1	17-07-1997
			JP 2000506405 T	30-05-2000
			US 6015406 A	18-01-2000
			ZA 9700099 A	18-07-1997
